

# Plain View



## Progressive grower reaps benefits

### About Chris Rundell

**This month we chose Chris Rundell as our Grower of the Month. He farms and runs a cow-calf operation in Prowers county, Colorado. He has cooperated with Colorado State University on numerous projects, such as cropping systems and insect studies.**

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**C**hris Rundell farms 12,000 acres and runs a cow-calf operation in Prowers County,

Colorado, using continuous cropping, minimum or conservation tillage, and opportunistic grazing practices. He's also a cooperating grower in the Areawide Pest Management for Wheat program. His father came to the area to farm in the 1950s. Chris farms the land his father farmed and land for absentee owners. He studied agriculture at Colorado Mountain College in Glenwood Springs and Lamar Community College. Farming since 1979, he continues with help of his wife, Cindy, and full-time hired hands.

He's a member of the Colorado Conservation and Tillage Association and has attended the association's meetings since 1979. "I started going to meetings when they were talking about no-till wheat. Then we only had one choice, spray chemical," he said. "You always have to be aware of new ideas and techniques and be willing to stick your neck out a little but not too far."

For years, Chris has cooperated with CSU on many projects, and his interaction has given him several sources for new ideas, technologies, and techniques. He tries to learn from all his experiences, both good and bad.

He explained to thrive or survive in Prowers County, it helps to have a diverse farm enterprises and a large number of dryland cultivated acres. "Colorado is different than other areas in that our area has high evapotranspiration and low moisture which precludes us from doing stuff that other areas can," he explained. "This year, in August, we only had 16 days that were 90 degrees or above. Usually we average 28 days. We had a cool August and warm September, which is opposite of most years." Because of the cooler temperatures, he had 12 acres of dryland corn that did well.

Chris adjusted crops due to drought conditions on his farm. He replanted several more acres into wheat this year, and several of his fields are not where they should be. "We've been fortunate in our local areas because we've caught moisture that other areas have not," he said. "A giant snow in February and March would be the best thing for Prowers County. Snow is better than rain any day of the year."

Winter wheat and grain sorghum are the main crops in his three year wheat-sorghum-fallow rotation. Over the years, Chris has experimented with growing Austrian peas, corn, and millet. The high temperature and evapotranspiration in Prowers County was not adequate for peas. He also tried sunflowers, but it was too

hot and dry in the area for success. In 2000, Chris grew 700 acres of dryland corn for cattle production. This year he grew 12 acres of dryland corn, and it worked well. Chris explained it was an experiment to learn from.

"Crop rotation can help with pest management, but it depends on how the land is managed. If the crop is healthy, it is less likely to have an insect problem," he said. "Brown wheat mite is an opportunistic insect, and when wheat is stressed, that's when the mites are a problem. Otherwise, when wheat is green and healthy, it can fight off brown wheat mite."

Chris harvests some of his residue with cattle. Cattle prices are high, and wheat prices are low. He uses vegetation growth as opposed to grain. He grazes the cattle on the volunteer wheat and chances overwintering Russian wheat aphids, or he gets rid of the volunteer wheat and loses an inexpensive food source for his cattle. It's another trade off for Chris.

Chris is opportunistic when it comes to his grain sorghum. After he harvests the grain, his cattle use the stalks. The cattle break the stalks down and convert them into energy. Chris then harvests the excess residue. He also raises forage sorghum. This year it didn't do well because it was too cold in August.

He grows three wheat varieties Akron, Ankor, and Prairie Red. He likes Akron best because it has proven yield. If he plants Ankor — the Russian wheat aphid version — he may be at a disadvantage because he may or may not have a Russian wheat aphid problem. The new biotype of the Russian wheat aphid may make the resistant variety obsolete.

Instead of Broadband application of liquid fertilizer, he has been experimenting with in row application. Using tubes to drop the fertilizer in the row saves him money because he does not have to alter farm implements.

For Chris Rundell, if the land is properly managed, it can be used for crop and cattle production. Chris is an open thinker and will continue to gain from exploring the many uses of the land in the unique area of Prowers County. More information about Chris is available on our Web site.



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*We are Areawide Pest Management for Wheat, a five-year project developed by the USDA Agricultural Research Service, to demonstrate pest management practices for the Russian wheat aphid and greenbug. Our main goal is to collaborate with wheat producers in evaluating and demonstrating non-chemical pest management techniques, with particular emphasis on the management of the Russian wheat aphid and the greenbug. The elements of our program include:*

- *Crop Diversification*
- *Variety Selection*
- *Field Monitoring and biocontrol*
- *Best Management practices for Wheat*

## **A Progressive Mind...**

Chris said he likes working with CSU, though it's a give-and-take relationship. He said sometimes it costs him something, but he learns something. He doesn't agree with everything they do but says they may see something he hasn't. He tries to avoid tunnel vision by looking at what other people are doing. He's also exploring development of wind energy in his County. Excel energy recently built in a wind farm in the area, the Colorado Green Project, with hopes of expansion. For more in-depth information about how Chris uses tillage, continuous cropping and other elements, please see our Website.



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**Areawide Pest Management for Wheat**  
Management of Russian wheat aphids and greenbugs



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